

Berlin stories

Whatever your opinion of outing now, it was definitely not a good idea in 1907. Three top advisers to Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II were exposed as homosexual that year—and the result was a massive backlash against Germany's budding gay rights movement and, worse, an intensification of German militarism that culminated in World War I.

Two of the kaiser's advisers were denounced for their "sick sexuality" by an ostensibly straight right-wing journalist named Maximilian Harden. His aim was to send Germany down the warpath against France by eliminating doves from the kaiser's inner circle. He succeeded, in part because it was impossible to hide the exploits of his main target, Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg, a poet and songwriter who frolicked with scores of working-class men. Imperial intervention allowed Eulenburg to escape prison, but he lost the ear of the kaiser, who then, as historian James Steakley and others have noted, became increasingly bellicose.

Meanwhile, gay firebrand Adolf Brand, publisher of the gay magazine *Der Eigene* (*The Singular*), outed Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow, second only to the kaiser. Furious that his entourage was being scandalized—Eulenburg's case made front-page

plays 1,400 items culled from 300 institutions and indi-

viduals the world over. Germany and the United States dominate the show—there is a Village People album cover and a campaign poster for San Francisco drag artist José Sarria, believed to be the first openly gay American to run for public office—but France, Russia, England, and Holland are also well-represented. Overall, the exhibition is an inspiring achievement.

Unfortunately, the show covers only gay men, not lesbians. The justifications—that not enough is known about early lesbian life, for example—ring hollow. As press spokesman Albert Eckert said, the omission is "wrong."

On a positive note, the exhibition is jubilantly erotic—on display are *fin de siècle* pornographic

images, a perfectly preserved 1910 police album of confiscated "indecent" photos, and

On display at the Berlin exhibition: a poster for the International Committee for Sexual Equality's 1952 conference and the Salomé painting *Two Boys*, 1988



culture

BY MARK SCHOOFS

"Goodbye to Berlin? 100 Years of Gay Liberation" (Akademie der Künste, Berlin)

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headlines the world over, including in *The New York Times*—the kaiser rigged a slander trial against Brand. The gay leader was imprisoned for 18 months, effectively quashing his wing of the movement and igniting popular animosity against homosexuals. Not until after the First World War would the gay movement recover.

This is one of hundreds of stories told in an ambitious historical exhibition titled "Goodbye to Berlin? 100 Years of Gay Liberation," held at Berlin's Akademie der Künste (Academy of Arts). Running through August 17, the exhibition dis-

works by Tom of Finland and Robert Mapplethorpe. But one would have liked to see as much about love as about sex: How did people structure their relationships in the various epochs? Were they accepted as couples by family and friends? How did they negotiate extracurricular affairs? There are some private photos and even formal oil portraits, but few *billets-doux* or ►

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diary entries, so the texture of past gay love lives remains unknown.

The exhibition marks the centennial of the founding in Berlin of Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the first modern gay rights organization. There were, of course, antecedents, but Hirschfeld's three decades of toil paved the way for unprecedented gains. (Curiously, Hirschfeld never acknowledged being gay, but at 50 he took up with a handsome 20-year-old, Karl Giese, whom he lived with until his own death 17 years later.)

After World War I, Weimar democracy unleashed freedom in Germany. Homosexual groups sprung up all over, and by 1929 an umbrella group called the Union for Human Rights claimed 48,000 members—more than any gay group in Germany today. Berlin, the homosexual capital of the Roaring Twenties, boasted a gay and lesbian bookstore, scores of bars, and more than 25 gay publications.

On January 30, 1933, Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany. The exhibition chronicles the terror that descended on gays that same year. March 4: A Berlin newspaper records a number of gay bars closed by the Nazis. May 6: The Nazis loot Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Studies. May 10: A chilling photograph shows clean-cut young Nazis rummaging through books about to be burned; one book, which several laughing youths are pointing at, is opened to a photo of Magnus Hirschfeld.

The Nazis' obliteration of Germany's thriving gay movement sends a warning that reverberates through the cautious organizing of the '50s, the psychedelic explosion of freedom in the '60s and '70s, and the angry street activism—often tied to AIDS—of the '80s and '90s. One part of the exhibition commemorates last year's U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn Colorado's Amendment 2, which would have revoked that state's gay rights ordinances. Had just two of the Court's votes gone the other way, it would now be legal for American gays to be deprived of their civil rights. Yes, we have put Buchenwald—where all homosexual prisoners were castrated and 14 were subjected to medical experiments aimed at making them "normal" men—far behind us. But not far enough. ■

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